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FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0660
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE: WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

REF: STATE 184972

11. Per reftel instructions, Post submits the following update to its 2005 Worst Forms of Child Labor report.

12. Background: Child labor is prevalent in Sierra Leone. Many children are employed in family businesses, subsistence farming, street trading, and domestic work. Within the country, trafficking occurs when impoverished parents or relatives in rural areas send children to urban areas where many find work as domestic laborers or commercial sex workers. Children also are sent to diamond mining areas where they are often sexually exploited or forced to work in mines. Sierra Leone's legislative and policy environment is supportive of children's rights in many ways, but the Government lacks the resources to effectively enforce and implement key laws and policies.

13. A) Laws and regulations proscribing the worst forms of child labor:

-- The GoSL has yet to ratify ILO 138 and 182. However, there is a bill before Parliament to ratify ILO 182. Additionally, the Parliament is presently debating a bill entitled, The Child Rights Act, 2006. When passed, the bill will set the minimum age for general employment at 15 years, which is also the maximum required age for compulsory primary education. Thirteen years will be the minimum age for light work, and only those 18 years and older can engage in hazardous work. Hazardous work includes working on sea-going vessels, mining and quarrying, portering of heavy loads, manufacturing industries where chemicals are produced or used, work in places where machines are used, and work in places such as bars, hotels, and places of entertainment where a person may be exposed to immoral behavior. The bill will not allow children to work at night between the hours of 2000 and 0600. One section of the bill provides protection for children from exploitative labor, which is defined as anything that deprives a child of his/her health, education or development.

-- Sierra Leone passed the Education Act of 2004, which provides basic education for all children beginning at age six and makes it a criminal offense for a parent to neglect to send his/her child to school for basic education. However, enforcement for all child labor and compulsory education provisions is limited.

14. B) Regulations for implementation and enforcement of proscriptions against the worst forms of child labor:

-- The Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Industrial Relations is responsible for enforcing child labor laws. Inadequate staff capacity and funding woes continue to hinder the Government's ability to effectively monitor child labor

issues, especially in the informal sector where a majority of children work.

15. C) Social programs to prevent and withdraw children from the worst forms of labor:

-- The Department of Labor will fund seven projects totaling \$275,000 from 2005 to 2007 under the Winrock International Community-Base Innovations to reduce Child Labor through Education (CIRCLE) program. These projects promote child protection issues and provide vocational skills and basic education training that seek to remove children from hazardous working conditions into an environment free from at risk conditions. The projects also will establish monitoring committees and centers for victims, as well as create group micro enterprises. NGOs have or will receive grants ranging from \$25,000 to \$71,000 for the projects, and in sum will target over 2,000 at risk children and nearly 200 parents and teachers.

-- The Countering Youth and Child Labor Through Education (CYCLE) initiative, a four-year \$6 million project funded by the Department of Labor and implemented by the International Rescue Committee in Sierra Leone and Liberia, focuses on the prevention of the worst forms of child labor. From September 2005 to March 2009, CYCLE will promote the reduction of exploitative child labor by improving accessibility to education for children engaged in exploitative or vulnerable child labor, by strengthening economic alternatives to child labor for families and communities, and by increasing awareness of the risks and loss of human potential for children engaged in child labor. The CYCLE project plans to move nearly 30,000 children in targeted communities in Sierra Leone and Liberia who are employed in worst forms of child

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labor or who are at risk of being employed in the worst forms of child labor into educational programs.

-- The Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program for Sierra Leone is an annual fund of \$200,000 that focuses on girls' retention and completion of primary education. It is part of President Bush's five-year African Education Initiative that seeks to increase access to quality basic educational opportunities in Africa. The program is in its second year, and will provide scholarships over five years for 3,000 primary school students in regions of Sierra Leone registering the poorest girls' enrollment record.

-- The law mandates primary school attendance for children age six to 12 and the government promotes a policy of free primary education. Despite government policy on free education, there are many informal fees that many families cannot afford to pay.

16. D) Comprehensive policy aimed at the elimination of the worst forms of child labor:

-- The Government, with technical assistance from the UK-funded Justice Sector Development Program, has established a National Child Justice Strategy for Sierra Leone. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs will have responsibility for implementation of policies geared to assist children in conflict with the law, children who are victims of abuse and children who might be at risk of abuse and delinquency. The strategy will also concentrate on bridging gaps between law and practice on children issues. One of the main considerations will be the establishment of safe homes or foster families for temporary placement of victims and channels and outlets for reporting child abuse.

-- Officials from the Ministries of Labor (MOL), Education, Science and Technology (MEST), Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) have been actively involved in sensitizing activities to increase awareness of child labor issues. The Minister of Labor gave a keynote speech at the

first ever celebration of World Day against Child Labor on June 12, 2006. UN and national radio voluntarily broadcasted a program multiple times in the local language of a panel discussion with participants from numerous ministries on the worst forms of child labor. Numerous community sensitizing training sessions were held throughout the country in July and had over 600 participants.

17. E) Progress toward eliminating the worst forms of child labor:

-- A needs and resource assessment conducted by the International Rescue Committee for the CYCLE project in six targeted towns/villages and surrounding areas in early 2006 found that 71.3 percent of 353 working children surveyed were engaged in exploitative child labor, which was likely to harm their health, safety and morals. Of the 353 children, 30.2 percent were engaged in dangerous or inappropriate work, 21 percent worked without adult supervision, 29.8 percent engaged in work that resulted in serious work injuries, and 17 percent used dangerous tools.

Among surveyed children involved in the unconditional worst forms of child labor, the largest proportion were found to have been involved in mining (12.1 percent) and to a lesser extent in prostitution (1.9) percent. However, this information likely significantly under-represented such cases.

Children not living with a parent are twice as likely in surveyed communities to be in exploitative child labor or out of school.

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